PitRu Karya (shrAddha)

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jiivato vaakyakaraNaat pratyabdham bhuuribhojanaat|

gayaayaam pinDadaanaacca tribhiH putrasya putratA||
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This smRiti vaakya says that the son is fit to be called a son, by obeying the parents during their lifetime, feeding braahmaNas every year and giving pinDa in gayaa.

The worship we do has three sections.

1. Vishvedevata aradhana
2. Pitru Pati aradhana
3. Our pitru puja

Vishvedevata aradhana

Vishvedevatas are 10 in number[1] and come as pair specific to each type of shraddha. For the yearly ritual (saamvatsarika shraaddha), Two vishve devas are puruurava and aardrava. naaraayaNa and aniruddha is worshiped in them. These are on the seat facing east.

Pitru Pati aradhana

The three pitru pati-s Soma, Yama and Kavyava.are worshipped[2]. They make sure the right type of "food" is given to our pitrus who may be in 7 different types of lokas. It means, pinDa is accepted by the pitRu devatas, who will then make sure that it reaches the pitRus (our ancestors) no matter in which janma/state they may be in. pitRus themselves do not come to take the pinDa!

[NOTE: "pitRus themselves do not come to take the pinDa" – People should realize and internalize this... and remember it when they come to do namaskaara to the piNDa. They assume that the pitrus themselves have come there in the same but invisible form. Consequently, these people become very eager to come as close as possible to the piNDa, almost to hug them :-)]

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[1] Vishve devathas are children of Dharma and Vishva, the daughter of Daxa. They are the guardians of the shraddha and prevent the daityas from snatching away the phala. In them one has to meditate Karari namaka Janardhana. Vishvedevatas are as follows:

1. ishti shraddha: kratu and Daxa;
2. Parva: Pururva, Ardrava
3. Vivaha Vasu and Sathya;
4. Kamya: Dhuri, Lochana
5. Naimittika: Kala, Kama

[2] There is a category of pitru-s numbering 100 and among then 7 are worshipped as *pitru-gana-devatas*. They are Vairaja, Barhishad, Agnishvata, Sukala, Angirasa, Susvadha, Somapa [Harivamsha 1.18] Above them there are 3 superior pitru-pati devatas Soma, Yama and Kavyava. These ganas are incharge of taking care of departed souls no matter where they are.
Sri Jagannath Dasaru has given this as a sandhi in HariKathamrithaSaara where the concept and anusandana is mentioned: Pitru gana devatas are the children of devatas. When these devatas lose vidya due to curse, their children teach them. A giver of knowledge is also called as "pita" and thus these progeny of the devatas are called as pitru ganas.

Our pitru puja

Our pitrus are represented with "pinda" made of 8 items representing their "avayava". Namaskra need to be done to them in particular. On the seat facing north, the following are worshipped

1. agniShtvaattas (vasu devas - antargata pradyumna) for father (or mother)
2. barhiShadas (rudra devas - antargata sankarShaNa) for grandfather (or grandmother)
3. sOmapas (aadityas- antargata vaasudeva) for great grand father (or great grandmother)

Thus 2 + 3 = 5 braahmaNas were actually worshiped with the understanding that they are the five forms of naaraayaNa. Two of them represent a pair of vishvedevas and in each aniruddha and naaraayaNa is seen. And in the other three who represent the three generation of parents, pradyumna, sankarShaNa and vaasudeva are seen[3]. During shraaddha we have to keep these five forms of the Lord in mind.

Thus in pitru puja, we worship the Lord Pradhyumna, Sankarshana, and Vasudeva in the respective adhistana of Vasu, Rudra Aditya who are present in our father, grandfather and g.grandfather. Lord Aniruddha is present in the karta, kriya and karma. Vasudeva gives the phala. When done with right anusandana, Vasudeva gives moxa itself.

So why do we give anna to crows on the day of shraadha? Do pitRu come in the form of crows on that day?

It is said that yamA has given a boon to the crows that when food is served to the crows during shrAddha, the pitRus will be satisfied. And there is an incident narrated in rAmayaNa.(vAlmIki rAmAyaNa utttara kanda 18th adh)

When rAvaNa come to attend a yajnya by maruttarAja the Gods get scared and turn into the various animals and birds. yamA takes the form of a crow. Later yamA gives a boon as given above.

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[3] Thus shraaddha, that we perform every year- is indicated by bhuuri bhojana or feeding the braahmaNas. In this ritual, two braahmaNaas for vishedevas and three braahmaNas for pitR^i devas was done eariler. But it requires a long and difficult penance afterwards for the braahmaNas who eat in that place. So now a days a darbha pavitra is placed in those seats meant for those brahmaNas and they are called "kuurcha roopi braahmaNas" [For receiving certain daanas and taking part in certain rituals the braahmaNa has to do some japa, paarayaNa and prayascitta. It is not just getting the daxiNaa and enjoying it. The praayascitta prescribed is certainly difficult for the present generation of purohitas so they may not be willing to accept taking part in those rituals. So nowa days a darbha pavitra is placed in the place of braahmaNa.]